DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 999 CE 057 931

TITLE Comprehensive Systems Approach for Improving Management Effectiveness of the Vocational and Technical Division of the Arkansas Department of Education. Final Report.
INSTITUTION Arkansas Univ., Fayetteville.
SPONS AGENCY Arkansas State Dept. of Education, Little Rock. Div. of Vocational and Technical Education.
PUB DATE Dec 89
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrators; Inservice Education; Leadership; *Management Development; Motivation; Organizational Climate; *Organizational Effectiveness; Postsecondary Education; Secondary Education; Self Evaluation (Groups); Social Support Groups; *State Departments of Education; *Systems Approach; *Vocational Directors; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Arkansas

ABSTRACT

The purpose of a 3-year project was to develop and implement an organizational intervention strategy designed to assist key administrators within the Arkansas Vocational and Technical Education Division in improving the organizational effectiveness of their administrative units. The Organizational Health Instrument was used as a diagnostic and development tool for identifying leadership/organizational strengths and improvement priorities and for assessing the success of those efforts. Data from individual profiles were used to design appropriate intervention strategies and inservice activities and to establish appropriate support systems. The goal of project activities was to assist division staff members in becoming advocates for goals within their area of influence and to understand and support the goals within the total division. The Organizational Health Instrument consists of 10 dimensions: (1) goal focus; (2) communication adequacy; (3) optimal power equalization; (4) resource utilization; (5) cohesiveness; (6) morale; (7) innovativeness; (8) autonomy; (9) adaptation; and (10) problem solving adequacy. Pre- and post-assessments of the division director and directors of 20 area vocational-technical schools showed that the levels of organizational health increased in all dimensions from 1984 to 1987. The composite organizational health and effectiveness of the area vocational-technical schools was enhanced during the project. (NLA)

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FINAL REPORT

COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEMS APPROACH FOR IMPROVING MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL DIVISION OF THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Funded under the provision of
Carl Perkins Act

December 1989

CE057931

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INTRODUCTION

Individuals serving as chief executive officers of state agencies during the 1980's have been and are being bombarded from all sides. Increased demands for accountability as well as taxpayer revolts have caused new demands for improved efficiency in state government. Many national groups have produced ''commission reports'' and ''white papers'' that have been critical of the quality of products being produced by various state and local agencies. As a result of this national attention, major educational reform measures have been mandated by state legislatures and these reform measures are being implemented in a majority of states today.

The intent of much of the legislation is very positive; however, members of the legislature and executive branches of government have been too involved in the specifics of these guidelines and regulations. Some of the legislative programs contain restrictive guidelines, rules and regulations that may have been appropriate under a certain set of conditions but inappropriate in others. It is not uncommon today for governors, members of legislatures, and members of state boards to provide specific instructions into areas that have been traditionally reserved for chief executive officers and professionals within their divisions. In retrospect, it is relatively easy to understand how executive leaders become ''trapped'' into a reactive posture within the current political environment. Unfortunately, these same factors which influence the chief executives of state agencies have a compounding influence upon their subordinates. Many times the subordinates do not fully understand the constraints placed upon their leaders by current political forces; thus, it has an a adverse influence upon their morale, motivation, and productivity.

The basic question that leaders of state agencies should be asking is: How can we capitalize on the national interest and change our leadership response from reactive to proactive? Although the basic answer is quite simple, successful implementation is much more complex. To reverse the erosion of executive leadership, executives must understand the complexities and interrelationships among their constituents, subordinates, and political leaders. If state leaders want to become proactive by definition, they must become visionary leaders and they must be able to assist their subordinates in capturing and/or magnifying the vision; and to establish a management system that promotes professional autonomy and accountability.

Dr. Barry Ballard, Director of the Vocational and Technical Division of the Arkansas Department of Education, assumed this proactive leadership stance. During the spring of 1985, he contracted for the services of an organizational consultant to assist him and his Administrative Council in re-examining the organizational structure and mission of the Division. Based upon organizational health profiles from 1984, personal interviews with members of the Administrative and Executive Councils, the consultant in consultation with Dr. Ballard prepared a set of basic assumptions to guide a three-year project.

OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of the project was to develop and implement an organizational intervention strategy designed to assist key administrators within the Vocational and Technical Education Division in improving the organizational effectiveness of their administrative units. The following objectives were established to guide project activities:

To diagnose the current level of Organizational Health within each administrative unit within the division,

To identify leadership strengths and improvement priorities for all division leaders based upon their Organizational Health profiles,

To assist leaders in translating "organizational problems" into organizational goals,

To assist leaders in establishing personal and organizational improvement priorities,

To design a staff development delivery system that would capitalize on existing knowledge and skills of division leaders, and

To assess the degree to which leaders were able to improve the organizational health and effectiveness of their administrative units.

PROCEDURES

Design

One of the unique features of this project was the use of the *Organizational Health Instrument* as a diagnostic and development tool for identifying leadership/organizational strengths and improvement priorities and for assessing the success of those efforts. Data from individual profiles as well as composite profiles for various groups were used to design appropriate intervention strategies, inservice activities, and for establishing appropriate support systems.

The following set of assumptions were based on the uniqueness of the Director's 1984 organizational health profile.

Assumptions

Based upon the organizational health profile of the Director as viewed by his immediate subordinates, the following goal and set of assumptions were established and served to guide project activities.

GOAL: To assist each individual within the Vocational and Technical Education Division to becomean advocate for goals within his/her area of influence and to understand and support the goals within the total division.

In order to achieve this goal it was important to reexamine and to alter some of the current procedures within the Division. Before changes were made it seemed reasonable that those changes should be made based upon a sound set of basic assumptions. The following set of assumptions were not designed to be a comprehensive and definitive set but were to serve as a starting point to guide the actions of the Executive and Administrative Councils.

1. The chief executive of any organization is responsible for providing visionary leadership and providing general direction for all employees within the orga..zation.
2. The larger and more complex the organization, the more the leader must provide a systematic structure for assisting his/her subordinates in providing direction and guidance for their subordinates.
3. The formal organizational chart should guide the behavior of individuals within the organization. (If the current chart isn't appropriate, it should be modified to reflect current practices or preferred practices.)
4. The chief executive of a complex organization must structure the organization to ensure that his/her span of control is limited to a few key organizational leaders.
5. The chief executive of a complex organization has a right to expect that most of the detail work is handled at lower levels within the organization.
6. The chief executive of a complex organization reduces the effectiveness of the organization when he/she allows and/or encourages "short circuits" within the organization.
7. The chief executive must work with the "Executive Council" and "Administrative Council" in establishing appropriate ground rules for decision-making and communicating within the organization.
8. The chief executive should model the behavior that he/she expects his/her subordinates to exhibit.
9. The chief executive should assist his/her Executive Council members in establishing specific performance objectives. These performance objectives should be measurable and should link

the individual's performance to the accomplishment of these goals. The degree to which these goals are accomplished should be used as part of a comprehensive system of goal setting and performance evaluation.

10. Through this negotiated goal setting and evaluation process the chief executive has the opportunity to direct and/or to facilitate purposeful behavior directed toward the accomplishment of organizational goals.

11. This same process should occur at each level within the professional staff of the organization. The goals of each unit are subject to review and approval of each individual's immediate supervisor. This process allows the chief executive to establish a system that will facilitate goal identification at the lowest level within the organization and refinement by that individual's immediate supervisor.

12. This process of goal setting and performance evaluation should not be seen as extra work that is in addition to the work load but as a systematic process for helping the organization to identify and achieve its goals and to acknowledge quality performance.

13. The chief executive of a complex organization needs to be sensitive to the many levels of bureaucracy within the organization and establish appropriate communication systems to ensure that creative individuals are not discouraged from being creative and productive. The system should encourage the "power of the idea" as being more important than the power of the position holder and this "challenge" should be viewed as a sign of organizational vitality.

Organizational Health Instrument

The Organizational Health concept was conceptualized by Matthew Miles[1] and operationally defined during a three-year, three-phase research and development project at the University of Arkansas by Hardage, Lucas, Holmes, and Fairman.[2] Reliability and validity have been established for the OHI.[3] The OHI consists of 80 items, 8 items on each of the ten dimensions. Response choices are Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Mean scores are computed for members of a work unit for each of the ten dimensions and converted to percentile scores. Organizational Health consists of the following dimensions:

1. ***GOAL FOCUS*** is the ability of persons, groups, or organizations to have clarity, acceptance, and support of goals and objectives.

2. ***COMMUNICATION ADEQUACY*** is that state when information is relatively distortion free and travels both vertically and horizontally across the boundaries of an organization.

3. ***OPTIMAL POWER EQUALIZATION*** is the ability to maintain a relatively equitable distribution of influence between members of the work unit and the leader.

4. ***RESOURCE UTILIZATION*** is the ability to involve and coordinate the efforts of members of the work unit effectively and with a minimal sense of strain.

5. ***COHESIVENESS*** is the state when persons, groups, or organizations have a clear sense of identity. Members feel attracted to membership in the organization. They want to stay with it, be influenced by it, and exert their own influence within it.

6. ***MORALE*** is that state in which a person, group, or organization has feelings of well-being, satisfaction, and pleasure.

7. ***INNOVATIVENESS*** is that ability to be and allow others to be inventive, diverse, creative, and risk taking.

8. ***AUTONOMY*** is that state in which a person, group, or organization can maintain ideals and goals as well as meet needs while managing external demands.

9. ***ADAPTATION*** is that ability to tolerate stress and maintain stability while being responsive to the demands of the external environment.

10. ***PROBLEM-SOLVING ADEQUACY*** is an organization's ability to perceive problems and solve them with minimal energy. The problems stay solved and the problem-solving mechanism of the organization is maintained and/or strengthened.

Target Populations

A series of pre- post-assessments for each administrative unit within the agency was to be conducted in May of each year. After a phase in process all individuals who were responsible for supervising at least five individuals were included in the target population. They were as follows:

1. Director
2. Deputy Director
3. Associate Directors
4. Supervisors
5. Directors of vocational technical schools

An unanticipated personnel change at the director level prior to the data collection period at the end of year three preempted the data collection for some groups within the organization. However, longitudinal data were available for some key groups within the agency.

A fourth year extension of the project had been tentatively approved prior to the resignation of the Director. However, with the resignation of the Director, the focus of the project was shifted from the Director to the Associate Director in charge of the area vocational technical schools. The extension of the project for the fourth year provided an opportunity to have three years of longitudinal data for the directors of the area vocational technical schools.

FINDINGS

Three years of longitudinal data were available for the Director of the division and for directors of twenty of the area vocational technical schools.

Division Data

As reported in Table 1, the levels of organizational health at the cabinet level increased in all dimensions from 1984 to 1987. The composite or total percentile scores improved from the 47th percentile in 1984, to 69th percentile in 1986, and the 74th percentile in 1987.

Table 1

Organizational Health Percentile Scores for the Division

CABINET	GF	COM	OPE	RES	COH	MOR	INN	AUT	ADA	PSA	TOTAL
1984	38	52	60	79	45	26	49	50	30	37	47
1986	59	59	93	73	70	63	79	78	58	60	69
1987	66	77	90	75	74	59	83	72	87	58	74

Goal Focus - Goal Focus was the targeted dimension throughout the project where Goal Focus is defined as the degree to which individuals, groups, and organizations have clarity, acceptances, and support of organizational goals. One of the initial objectives and challenges was to capitalize on the diversity of individual interests and talents within the Cabinet. Members of the Cabinet adopted the goal that each individual within the Vocational and Technical Education Division would become an advocate for goals within his/her area of influence and to understand and support the goals within the total division. As graphically shown in Figure 1, the level of Goal Focus as viewed by Cabinet members increased during each of the three years from the 38th percentile in 1984, to the 59th percentile in 1986 and to the 66th percentile in 1987.

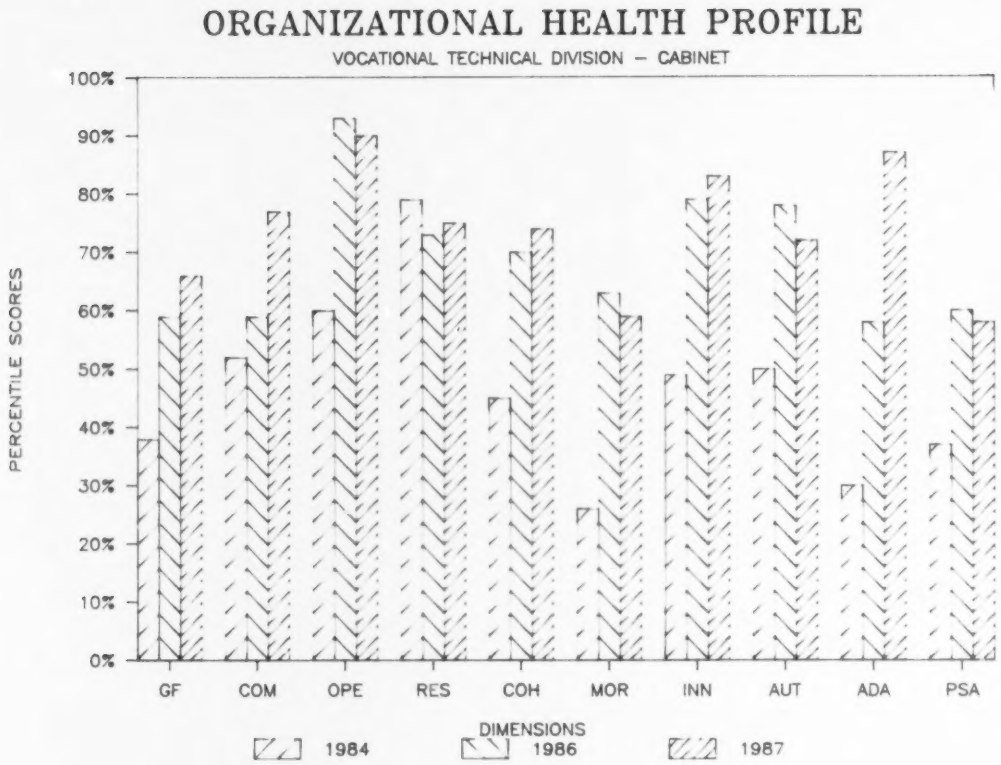

Figure 1. Organizational Health Profile for the Division

Adaptation - During the 36 months from the initial diagnosis to the results in the spring of 1987, cabinet members' responses to the OHI indicated that their greatest improvement was in Adaptation. Percentile scores improved from 30, to 58, to 87 during the three-year period. These scores indicate that cabinet members believed that the agency was becoming more responsive in adapting to the needs of its constituents and that organizational members were willing and able to make the needed changes..

Innovativeness - The percentile scores on Innovativeness increased each year from 49, to 79, to 83 indicating that the Director had the ability to be, and that he encouraged members of the cabinet to be, diverse, creative, and risk taking. Innovation is similar to adaptation but is driven from an internal rather than an external need for change.

Cohesiveness - The increases in percentile scores on Cohesiveness closely parallel the increases in Goal Focus. The greatest increase was between 1984 to 86 with a smaller increase from 1986 to 87. The percentile scores increased from 45, to 70, to 74 during the three-year period indicating that members of the Cabinet were becoming progressively more effective as a management team.

Communication Adequacy - Communication Adequacy also increased each year during the project where Communication Adequacy is defined as the degree to which information travels relatively distortion free both vertically and horizontally within the organization. As the levels of Goal Focus increased, it was understandable that there was a parallel increase in Communication Adequacy. These percentile scores increased each year from 52, to 59, to 77 indicating that communication was becoming increasingly more effective each year.

The percentile scores for four of the dimensions showed similar patterns with a sizeable increase from 1984 to 1986 but with a slight drop in 1987. A slight decline in both Optimal Power Equalization and Autonomy can also be attributed to an increase in Goal Focus. Four months prior to the assessment in 1987, the agency participated in a formal goal-setting retreat. Members throughout the agency as well as influential externals were invited to participate and to help prioritize the goals. It is reasonable to assume that as the agency became more "goal focused" that some previous activities may have fallen outside the basic thrust of the agency. Therefore, it is understandable that some members of the cabinet felt as if they had less Autonomy and less Power than they possessed previously.

A substantial increase in percentile scores was evident from 1984 to 1986 on Morale and Problem Solving Adequacy but a decline was evident in 1987. In visiting with Cabinet members regarding this decline, they indicated that the resolution of some of the problems with which they were dealing were external to the decision-making machinery within the Cabinet. When problem resolutions become external to an administrative unit, it is understandable that it can negatively impact the Morale of members of the unit.

Resource Utilization was the most stable dimension during the project with percentile scores ranging from a high of 79 in 1984 to a low of 73 in 1986. This dimension was 32 points higher than the composite organizational health score in 1986 and 53 points higher than Morale. This clearly indicated that the Director knew the talents of members of the Cabinet and that he utilized those talents to a high

degree throughout the project. However, he was able to create a better balance of organizational health during the project. While Resource Utilization remained a strength in 1987 (75th percentile), the dimensions of Optimal Power Equalization, Adaptation, Innovativeness, and Communication Adequacy increased to the 90th, 87th, 83rd, and 77th percentiles, respectively.

Area Vocational and Technical Schools

During the fourth year of the project, the focus of the project changed from the Director to the Deputy Director in charge of the 24 area vocational technical schools. Only those schools which collected organizational health data during each of the three springs were included in this analysis. Comparative data were available for twenty of the twenty-four schools. As reported in Table 2, the composite percentile scores for the 20 schools were 45, 56, and 52 for 1987, 1988, and 1989,

Table 2

Organizational Health Percentile Scores for the 20 Vocational and Technical Schools.

SCHOOLS	GF	COM	OPE	RES	COH	MOR	INN	AUT	ADA	PSA	TOTAL
1987	45	44	38	38	47	49	38	48	50	52	45
1988	62	56	61	58	55	53	61	54	48	52	56
1989	53	49	51	51	46	58	47	56	56	56	52

respectively. Scores ranged in 1987 from a low of the 38th percentile for the dimensions of Optimal Power Equalization, Resource Utilization and Innovativeness to a high of 52 on Problem Solving Adequacy. The three greatest strengths as viewed by the faculties in the twenty schools were Problem Solving Adequacy, Adaptation and Morale with percentile scores of 52, 50, and 49 respectively.

With the initiation of advisory councils elected by their faculties in 1988, Optimal Power Equalization increased by 23 percentile points. Substantial gains were also made in Innovativeness, Resource Utilization and Goal Focus with percentile increases of 23, 20, and 17 points, respectively. The composite percentile score increased by 11 points during the year. The only dimension that decreased during the year was Adaptation with a two percentile decrease.

As graphically shown in Figure 2, four of the ten dimensions continued to improve while scores for the other six dimensions decreased from the spring of 1988 to 1989. The composite score for

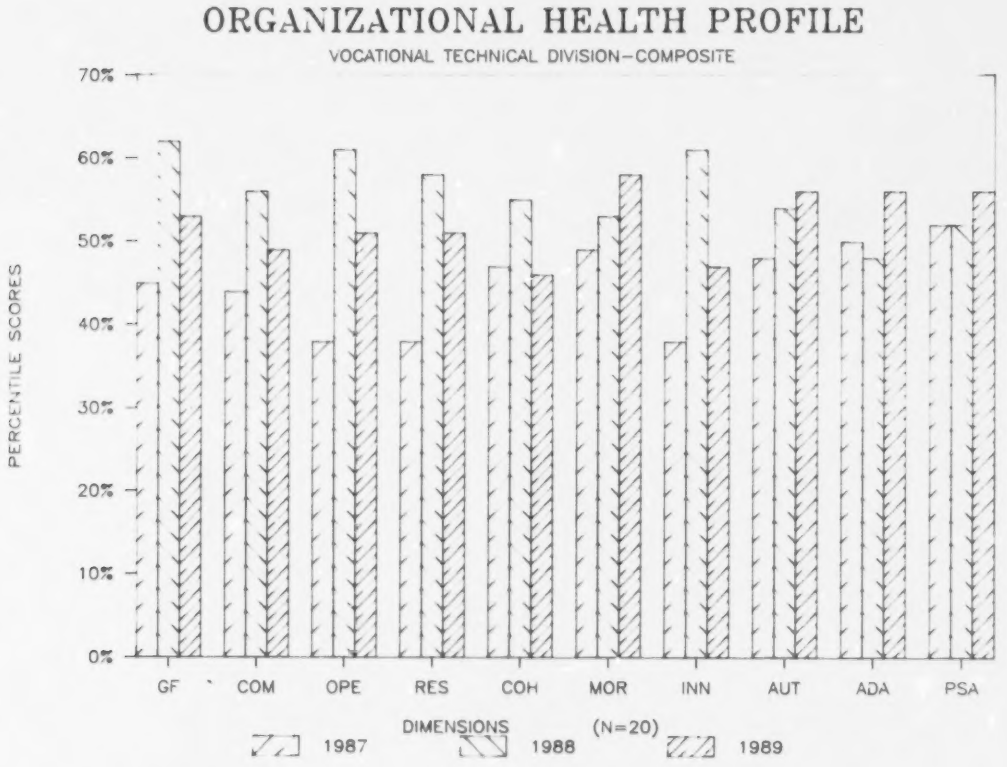

Figure 2. Composite Profiles of Vocational Technical Schools

the twenty administrative units decreased by four percentile points. Many external observers were surprised that the organizational health of the area vocational technical schools remained relatively stable during the 1988-89 year and only lost four composite percentile points. Mr. Don Harlan, Associate Director, should be credited with providing leadership during the 1988- 89 year in a way that sustained many of the previous gains.

During the spring of 1988 and the 1988-89 academic year, several issues emerged that had the potential of negatively impacting the organizational health and effectiveness of the area schools. These

included, but were not limited to, the following:

> The Director of the Division resigned because of a controversy within one of the schools that became political.
>
> An acting director was named external to the agency for approximately four weeks followed by an interim director who served for more than a year.
>
> Restructuring attempts at the state level seriously challenged the existing roles, responsibilities and functions within the division as well as within the area vocational technical schools.

The negative impact of the external environment on the organizational health of the Division and administrative units was lessened by leadership provided by Don Harlan and the directors of the schools. It is understandable that Cohesiveness was the only dimension that was lower in 1989 than 1987. The volatility of the external and internal environments forced members throughout the agency to take sides on some important but divisive issues.

The levels of Innovativeness within the schools suffered the greatest loss with a decrease of 14 percentile points. These data suggest that the directors of these schools found it necessary to emphasize the need to be adaptive and to minimize the risk taking and creativity associated with Innovativeness.

It is interesting to note that directors were viewed as increasing the levels of Adaptation, Autonomy, Morale, and Problem Solving Adequacy during this somewhat volatile period. During the time when the Division was being administered by an acting or interim director, the directors may have re-emphasized the need to be responsive (Adaptation) to external pressures. With the emphasis being placed at the state level, it is understandable that local directors were able to increase the individual autonomy within their schools, and to improve the problem-solving machinery at the local level. Increases in Autonomy, Adaptation, and Problem Solving Adequacy had a positive impact upon the Morale within the vocational technical schools.

The organizational health of the vocational technical schools increased substantially from 1987 to 1988. Six of the ten dimensions decreased from 1988 to 1989, however; they remained well above the percentile scores established in 1987. As graphically shown in Figure 2, three of the ten dimensions increased in each of the three years.

EVALUATION

A systematic process for providing objective and reliable feedback concerning the internal workings of administrative units was provided. The *Organizational Health Instrument* was administered to subordinates in a group setting during April/May each year. Provisions were established to ensure confidentiality of responses and the integrity of the research data.

The organizational health and effectiveness of the Director's Cabinet as viewed by Cabinet members increased during each of the three years. The composite percentile scores increased from 47 in 1984, to 69 in 1986, and to 74 in 1987. These data clearly indicate that the project and project activities were instrumental in improving the internal workings of the unit as evidenced by an improvement of 27 percentile points from 1984 to 1987.

A composite view of the organizational health and effectiveness of the twenty vocational technical schools as viewed by the faculties clearly indicated that the project also had a positive impact upon the internal workings of their local units. The composite percentile scores from the twenty administrative units increased from the 45th percentile in 1987 to the 52nd percentile in 1989.

CONCLUSIONS

A comprehensive management system was designed for improving the leadership effectiveness of administrators and supervisors throughout the division. The system provided a systematic process for gaining feedback from subordinates on an annual basis. Feedback from responses to the *Organizational Health Instrument* were analyzed, converted to percentile scores, and graphed for ease of interpretation. These profiles provided an important linkage between the subordinates and the leader's supervisor. These data placed the supervisor in a facilitating role as he/she assisted the leader and members of his/her unit in developing specific strategies for improving the effectiveness of their administrative unit. These data became an important component of the individual's personal and organizational improvement plan and had important implications for the individual's performance appraisal and personal development.

Using the Director's organizational health profile as the basis for designing an organizational intervention strategy proved to have a positive impact upon the effectiveness of the Cabinet during the

three-year period. The intervention strategy was extended to include the directors in each of the area vocational technical schools across the state. The Associate Director served as a role model and facilitator for the local directors as they designed personal and organizational improvement strategies. The composite organizational health and effectiveness of the area vocational technical schools was enhanced during the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

State leaders who are interested in replicating the project as a strategy for improving management effectiveness within their agency can do so with assurance that the organizational health profiles will prove invaluable in enhancing and maintaining leadership effectiveness.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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